

CONSUMER BULLETIN #97-4

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Consumers Beware! The next time you decide to enter a sweepstakes contest to win a new car or cash prize at the local mall or restaurant, be sure to read the fine print at the bottom of the sweepstakes entry form, or you may be getting more than just a chance at a prize. A company called "*Consumer Access*" is running a "free" sweepstakes contest in malls and restaurants across the nation offering \$25,000.00 in cash or a new car to the winner. People who enter the sweepstakes learn when they receive their next phone bill that the entry form they filled out was actually an application for calling card services offered by *Consumer Access* that they are charged for through their local telephone company.

By signing the entry form, the consumer accepts an activation charge of \$4.96 and a minimum monthly charge of 20¢ a day. Often, the consumer is not even aware they have access to this service. In some instances, children have entered the contest, with their parents being billed for the calling card service that their child unwittingly signed-up for.

The terms and conditions of the calling card service are listed on the back of the sweepstakes entry form, along with an 800 number to reach the company. However, once the entry form is filled out and dropped into an entry box, the customer no longer has access to the information listed on the back of the form. In addition, the sweepstakes display does not obviously mention that entrants are signing up for calling card services by entering the sweepstakes.

If you enter a sweepstakes contest, be sure to read the entire entry form, front and back!

Customers who unknowingly sign-up for the *Consumer Access* calling card and do not want the service should call 1-800-555-4159 to cancel the calling card, as well as their local telephone company who may remove the charges from the customer's bill.

Consumers who have questions regarding *Consumer Access* should call the Maine Public Utilities Commission's Consumer Assistance Hotline at (207) 287-1597 or (800) 452-4699.

The Maine PUC may also be reached at: Main: (207) 287-3831
TTY Relay (800) 437-1220
E-mail: maine.puc@state.me.us
Fax: (207) 287-1039

View the Maine Public Utilities Home page at: <http://www.state.me.us/mpuc/homepage.htm>